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ABSTRACT

The University of Nebraska (with the help of the University of Northern Colorado) has established a program to provide practicing teachers with training qualifying them for the teaching certificate endorsement for teaching the visually handicapped. The program was especially designed to fill a state need for teachers of the visually handicapped for rural area schools. The endorsement program provides training in two 5-week summer programs as well as practicum experience. Thirty total credit hours are provided in six intensive one-week courses in such areas as the psychology of exceptional children and education of the visually handicapped. Credit for practicum experience is provided in two ways: (1) placement under an experienced, certificated teacher, with 240 clock hours of supervisory experience required for 6 hours of credit; and (2) credit by examination, and upon the recommendation of an administrator/supervisor who must verify that the teacher has had at least 1 year of teaching experience with the visually handicapped. Braille proficiency is acquired through the Library of Congress correspondence course. Although University of Northern Colorado faculty initially taught the two-summer sequence, guest faculty are currently used. Program advertisement and teacher recruitment was achieved through work with local directors of special education. Program funding was obtained through several sources, including the state department of education, federal funds, and trust funds. To date 32 teachers have completed all requirements for the endorsement. (CB)

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PRESERVICE PREPARATION OF TEACHERS OF THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED IN A RURAL STATE

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The Need

There are 496 Visually Handicapped children in Nebraska who are not in the State residential school for the Visually Handicapped. Of this number, only 167 children and youth are being served by 21 teachers who have a teaching certificate endorsement for visually handicapped. This means that 329 children who are verified as needing services for their visual handicaps and who qualify for APH quota funds are being served by teachers who do not have the appropriate certificate endorsement. In addition, there are 92 children who are under evaluation or are receiving services for visual handicaps who are as of this date not verified but are likely to need qualified teachers.

Other established preparation programs for the VH and O&M areas have not been able to supply more than an occasional graduate to Nebraska Schools. When graduates of other programs have taken positions in Nebraska, they generally have resulted from the transfer of a spouse to a job in the state and not because of the attraction of the position. Graduates from the nearest other preparation programs, University of Northern Colorado to the west and Northern Illinois University to the east, tend to have many, more attractive offers in more populated areas from which to choose. Being the only VH teacher in a community under 1500 population which is 100 or more miles from a city of any sizable population is not attractive to a young person, especially when the salary schedule may not compare well to some urban districts.

Development of the Curriculum

In 1979, the faculty of the University of Northern Colorado Program for the Visually Handicapped helped the University of Nebraska establish a program for teachers of the visually handicapped and taught the first summer of the two summer sequence. The courses were set up as five intensive one-week offerings each summer with braille, Psychology of Exceptional Children and a practicum to be taken during the academic year or during a third summer session. Since the first summer, the program has involved faculty from other established programs teaching in their strongest areas which has provided Nebraska students the opportunity to learn from the experts from many programs.

One problem which had to be overcome when setting up the program was that of credit for the courses. The plan was to offer each of the University of Northern Colorado courses as one week of 30 contact hours which under the Carnegie credit rule would be worth 3 quarter hours or two semester hours. While the UNL is on a semester schedule, the UNL Faculty Senate and Graduate College permits no more than one credit hour of graduate credit for each week of instruction, no matter how many hours of instruction are involved. If the student registers for the entire five-week session, however, six credits may be earned. Therefore, the total number of credit hours which could be earned for the two-summer sequence of ten weeks was 12 credit hours.

EC 200 261

Figure 1, Endorsement Program

TEACHER OF THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
LEVEL: K-12

SPED 879	PSYCHOLOGY OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN	3
SPED 851	EDUCATION OF THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED	6
SPED 852	TEACHING THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED	6
SPED 897	PRACTICUM: VISUALLY HANDICAPPED	6
	BRAILLE PROFICIENCY	
SUPPORTING COURSES*		9
	TOTAL	30

*CHOOSE ACCORDING TO ENDORSEMENT LEVEL HELD
K-12: GUIDED ELECTIVES
K-6: ADOLESCENT PSYCH, SECONDARY SPED METHODS, SPECIAL VOCATIONAL NEEDS
7-12: CHILD PSYCH, IMPROVEMENT OF INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY READING, IMPROVEMENT OF INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY MATH

When the program was first developed, the total credit hours for the endorsement was 21. Certificate endorsement criteria suggested a minimum of 30 credit hours for a subject endorsement. The UNL Teachers College Curriculum Committee approved the endorsement which was submitted to the Nebraska State Education Department Certification Office and the State Board of Education which accepted the endorsement as a special case. Subsequent NCATE, North Central Accreditation and State program approval visits have approved the program. Two years ago, Nebraska adopted new standards for special education endorsements and the program was revised, primarily with the addition of courses in other areas to meet standards for the K-12 level.

Each one-week course is scheduled for 30 contact hours of instruction: 9-12:00 and 1-4:00 daily. Breaks, of course, are scheduled near the mid-points of the morning and afternoon sessions. Instructors are encouraged to provide a variety of activities such as demonstrations, films, discussion/study groups, etc. to further break up the sessions in order to reduce classroom fatigue. Field trips to various agencies or facilities and laboratory activities are also scheduled when appropriate to the topics being presented.

Figure 2, Course Sequence

SUMMER ONE COURSES (851)

SURVEY: EDUCATION OF THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF VISION LOSS
COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF LOW VISION
PRINCIPLES OF ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY

SUMMER TWO COURSES (852)

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE EYE
TEACHING THE MULTIHANDICAPPED BLIND
ASSESSMENT OF THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
MATERIALS FOR TEACHING THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED
METHODS FOR TEACHING THE VISUALLY HANDICAPPED

Providing Practicum Experience and Braille Proficiency

Credit for practicum experience with the visually impaired is accomplished in two ways: (1) Regular graduate credit with placement under an experienced, certificated cooperating teacher with supervision from the University and (2) Credit by Examination with undergraduate credit. For trainees who are full-time teachers, the placement for graduate credit usually occurs within a summer school program in the Omaha Public Schools or at the Nebraska School for the Visually Handicapped. When the teacher is working in a setting with visually handicapped students, supervision may be arranged and credit awarded. A minimum of 240 clock hours of supervised experience is required for six hours of credit.

Under the Credit by Examination option, undergraduate credit is obtained upon the recommendation of the teacher's administrator or supervisor. The administrator/supervisor verifies in writing that the teacher has had at least one year of successful teaching experience with the visually impaired. Informal verification is usually obtained from the State Consultant for the Visually Handicapped as to the teacher's competence before the credit is awarded. The credit for the practicum appears on the transcript as advanced standing examination which is sufficient for certification purposes. Since most of the trainees are experienced teachers, the successful teaching experience is not difficult to verify. If the trainee is inexperienced, the graduate credit option is required.

Braille proficiency is acquired through the Library of Congress Braille Transcribers Correspondence Course. When setting up the program, the consultants believed that proficiency in transcribing braille for school-age children would be sufficient if teachers completed Lessons 1-12 of the Library of Congress course. A local certified braille instructor offered to develop a braille proficiency test and to grade the lessons for the students in order to

save the time necessary to mail the lessons to Washington, D.C. Students paid the instructor $5 per lesson and for grading the proficiency test. Since 1982, the Prose and Cons Braille Unit has provided this service for the same fees. Turn around time for lesson feedback is two or three days so that students can progress through the 12 lessons as fast as they wish. Although all that is necessary is verification to the program director that proficiency of 80% or better has been obtained, students may register for credit under a directed field experience title. The drawback to the transcribers course is that it does not provide the teacher suggestions on how to teach braille to young children.

Faculty Recruitment

For the first summer of the program, the faculty of the University of Northern Colorado provided the instruction. Dean Tuttle, Director of that program, was instrumental in setting up the program and the first summer of work. After the first summer, he determined that having a different faculty member absent for five different weeks out of his program was too much to ask of his students and faculty, who had to cover for each other. He made some recommendations for faculty to contact for the second summer of the program. Phil Hatlen from San Francisco State University, who was consulting for the Nebraska Department of Education, added some other names, including his own. Letters were sent to the persons nominated explaining the program and what would be expected of them. The five weekly courses were assigned with some minor adjustment of the planned schedule.

From that point forward, the guest faculty usually had suggestions from among their colleagues as to who might be asked to teach various courses in subsequent summers. The program director also attended leadership conferences sponsored by the University of Michigan where additional contacts were made. The program has attained enough visibility at this point that when a person is contacted for a proposed appointment, the main problem to be worked out is an open date for them to schedule to come to Nebraska.

Nearly every summer, the program has hired one or two doctoral students upon the recommendation of their advisors. Usually they have completed all of their coursework and have engaged in teaching the content for the course on their campus or in an inservice workshop for experienced teachers. Some of the best evaluations of teaching have been on these instructors. They have a freshness in their presentations and apparently have prepared themselves well. The UNL Graduate College has little problem with sub-doctoral instructors in this situation as long as the majority of the overall program is taught by doctoral level faculty.

Program Advertisement and Student Recruitment

The key to filling vacancies for teachers of the visually handicapped in rural areas is the local or area director of special education. He or she usually knows the experienced and qualified teachers who are established in the locality and are likely to remain in the area. At the point where the guest faculty have been appointed, usually in January, a mailing is prepared to send to all directors of special education in the state as well as to consultants and other interested personnel in surrounding states. The mailing describes the nature of the program, requirements, the faculty for the courses being offered, dates of the offering, housing applications and other information to assist potential students in preparing to participate in the program. The cover letter suggests to the directors that if they have a position vacancy in the area of the visually handicapped, their best bet to fill the position is to encourage a teacher in their systems to enroll in the program. In many cases, the directors have been in touch with the state consultants regarding their needs and have already submitted names of persons to whom materials can be sent directly. Such persons as well as any person who has previously expressed interest in the program and all persons who have ever been enrolled in the program are sent a separate mailing of application materials.

While potential trainees may may still have reservations about leaving their families for the teacher training program during the summer, the relative shortness of the program (five weeks per summer), no expense for tuition and inexpensive housing provide some attractiveness to the program. Some students have stayed with relatives or friends to further reduce their costs. There always is at least a week in the middle of the course offerings where no class is scheduled so that they may return to their homes. The week of the Fourth of July holiday is unscheduled because of the short week and in even years, the Association for the Education of the Visually Handicapped holds its conference during the last week of June which makes acquiring a faculty member difficult. This hiatus also give the students a break from the intense pace of the week long courses.

Methods of Funding

Various methods have been used to fund the program. Since a large number of teachers at the state school lacked proper endorsement, an account of the Trust fund earmarked for teacher inservice was used to fund the first two years of the program. The $10,000 was augmented in the second year with some Title VI-B administrative funds from the Nebraska Department of Education. The third and fourth years were somewhat rocky with funds coming from fours different sources; Title VI-B, Title VI-D from the State Department, a portion from Deaf-Blind funds and some from the Barkley Trust Fund which provides support to various special education programs in the Department of Special Education. The fifth and sixth years were funded entirely with a grant from USDE, OSERS, DPP. A grant proposal has been submitted to OSERS for funding the next three years. A part of that proposal is to develop a training program for orientation and mobility instructors based on the present model.

Cost

Program cost for the first year (1979) was $5,900. This included a $650 honorarium for each guest faculty member, air coach fare, ground transportation, materials reproduction, meals and lodging. Cost for the past summer was $7,000 which included an $800 honorarium and and an average of $600 per week for guest faculty expenses including airfare, food and lodging. Because the instruction is paid by external sources, UNL waives the tuition for the students. If a school budgeted the expenses for the instruction, tuition could pay for some of the costs.

Evaluation Data

Positive comments were made about the expertise of the instructors and their excitement about their subject. Comments from other years have been in a similar vein in regard to positive comments about the variety of instructors and their attempts to provide a solid foundation for learning about the visually handicapped while providing a lot of practical techniques for working effectively with them. They like the one course per week and the opportunity to learn from outstanding leaders in the field. They also acknowledge that they get a lot of sitting time in five weeks and appreciate having one or two weeks off in the middle of the five weeks of instruction. Every summer, students have commented about the opportunity to interact with the other students and getting to know them closely. It is known that during the year they feel free to call each other when they have a question about what to do about something and know that another teacher has had experience with the same situation. They plan reunions each summer and invite former participants to come back and meet with a particular instructor.

To date, there have been 87 persons take an average of 10.5 hours of credit. They have come from 41 different communities in six different states. There have been 32 teachers complete all the requirements for the endorsement. Those completing the program had an average braille proficiency of 90.2%.

Summary

A model for delivering a teaching certificate endorsement program for teachers of the visually handicapped over a two summer sequence was presented. The effectiveness of the training in relation to program cost is very good. It has been shown to be a viable model for preparing teachers for a low-incidence area in a rural state.